Garden Report Fall 2006

Internships

As a result of the generous support of alumni-sponsored internships, three students participated in the College Organic Garden this summer as full-time interns (Jenny Schneider '07, Caitlyn Olson '09 and Rosalind Chaplin '09). An additional, part-time intern (Anna Viel '07), was funded partly with income from the Garden. The summer program in the garden provides "hands on" opportunities for interns to learn about building soil health, understanding crop cycles, small farm economics and alternative energy on the farm. Interns prepare the soil, seed crops, cultivate the garden, harvest the crops and deliver them to Dining Services and to local restaurants. At the end of the summer they evaluate individual crops and production techniques and make recommendations for changes for the next season.

Production Garden

Many of our crops had banner years: sugar snap peas, mesclun lettuce, spinach, golden beets, Swiss chard and cherry tomatoes. We increased the size of the garden from 1.5 acres to about 2 acres and put most of the new sections into cover crops for the summer. We planted 1/8 acre of soybeans that we plan to harvest in mid-October and hope that some of our harvest will be used locally to produce bio diesel fuel. In the future we plan to run a roto-tiller on fuel grown at the garden. We also increased the flower and herb planting in our insectaries to encourage pollinators and attract beneficial insects (those that prey upon the insects that damage our crops). We supplied produce to all of the College's dining halls as well as many Middlebury restaurants when Dining Services closed for their break in late-August.

Harvest Festival

The fourth annual Organic Garden Harvest Festival was held on Saturday, September 23, 2006. Over 125 students and many community folks attended. 90% of the food served came from the Garden, including sweet potato fries from our 40-pound harvest!

Honey Harvest

This year also marked the fourth annual honey harvest. Although it was a poor year for honey production in Addison County, our hives produced 70-pounds which the students harvested and bottled with the help of local beekeeper Ross Conrad.

Seed Saving Project

After three years of seed saving we've made some decisions about tomato varieties to keep and those to let go. Our Corne de Bouc paste tomato (from Quebec) has been a constant producer of very disease resistant, excellent tasting, large fruited tomatoes for all three years of our trials. We will keep selecting from our 2006 crop for next year's seed. We also will continue saving seed for "Troutback" lettuce which has been a constant performer for beautiful looks and great taste.

Children's Garden

Our Children's Garden program took a different turn this year as we worked with the Mary Hogan Elementary School summer program. Very different from the preschoolers we've worked with in the past, these 5th and 6th graders were much more verbal, and we enjoyed their sophisticated observations and questions. We also had visits to Slow the Plough by the St. Mary's School preschool group and the Community Friends program.

Classes

In early May, Scott Russell Sanders, author and professor at the University of Indiana, held a seminar entitled "Community, Sustainability, and the Writing Life" at the garden with Middlebury's Stewart Professor of English and Environmental Studies John Elder.

Andrea Olson (dance), Anne Knowles (geography), Gregg Humphrey (teacher education) and Peter Ryan (geology) also held classes at the garden during the fall semester.

Farm Visits

The Champlain Valley has an amazing diversity of farms. Each week during the summer, the interns and I visited farms that reflected a variety of styles and products. We spent time at Lincoln Peak Vineyard (northern hardy wine grapes), Gleason Grains (22 years in business: organic wheat, flour and bread), Golden Russet (25 years in business:16 acres of organic vegetables), Green Mountain College Farm (organic vegetables, eggs), Essex Farm (5 years in business: 500 acre organic vegetables, beef, chickens and milk products, CSA), Champlain Valley Bees and Queens (30 years in business: honey and starter colonies of mite resistant bees), Orb Weaver Farm (26 years in business: cheese and vegetables-a 6 cow organic dairy), Champlain Orchard (organic and low spray apples. Peaches and raspberries), Someday Farm (25 years old: vegetables, turkey, chicken, CSA), and the Intervale Foundation (26 farms providing 7% of Burlington's food).

Discussions with the farm owners ranged from economics of local markets, to crop production, alternative energy on the farm and the future of farming.

Visitors

In May, Dalton Cox ('03) and her students from the Green Mountain Valley School in Waitsfield visited the Garden to help them plan a similar project for their own school. Students and

administrators from Bennington College also stopped-in to ask questions about local food production.

During the summer, we welcomed many former Middlebury students. The garden advisor and interns from the Green Mountain College Farm also visited Slow the Plough so that we could exchange gardening insights.

In October, the advisor and students from the Loeb Fellows group at Harvard will visit the Garden.

Other

The Organic Garden became a member of Slow Food International. This Italian organization created in 1986 has 80,000 members in over 100 countries and promotes agricultural biodiversity and protects traditional foods from extinction. In October 2006, Garden intern and MCOG hub Emily Peterson and I will attend the Slow Food 2006 Terra Madre conference in Turin, Italy as delegates from the Middlebury College Organic Garden.

Students in the Garden group organized a film festival for Winter Term 2006. Films included: *Life Running Out of Control*, *McLibel*, *Reinventing the World*, *Beyond Organic*, and *My Father's Garden*.

Inquiries

In the past year we received inquiries from students and faculty at colleges and universities interested in starting or improving an organic garden. This year the inquiries came from:

Harvard University, Brown University, Colorado College, University of Virginia, Tulsa University, Plattsburgh (NY) State College, Furman College and Bowdoin College.

I want to thank the many members of the College staff, community members and alumni that have helped in the development of the garden program. It has been most gratifying to be part of such a positive experience.

Jay Leshinsky

Garden Advisor

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